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# ROBERT LETTIS HOOPER

DEPUTY QUARTER-MASTER GENERAL

IN THE

CONTINENTAL ARMY

AND

VICE-PRESIDENT OF NEW JERSEY

By CHARLES HENRY HART

HONORARY MEMBER OF THE NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PHILADELPHIA

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## COLONEL ROBERT LETTIS HOOPER

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THIS monograph is the result of a certain amount of inquisitiveness to learn who was "Mr. Hooper," mentioned in a letter written by Governor William Franklin, in 1771, that the writer was editing<sup>1</sup> and of the fact that after identifying "Mr. Hooper" as Robert Lettis Hooper, Jr., no biographical notice of him could be found so that the only way to get one was by writing it. Hooper's career has been very difficult to trace, owing to there having been three, if not four, generations bearing the same name, and also from his having lived part of his life in New Jersey and part in Pennsylvania, with lightning changes from one to the other. Nevertheless, it seems odd that it has never been attempted before and that a man, who was so prominently before the people at such an important epoch in the country's history, should not sooner have had the events of his life preserved in a consecutive form, especially when there is ample material at hand. This apparent neglect may arise from the fact that, as we shall see, he left no descendants. In the Historical Society of Pennsylvania alone, there are at least sixty autograph letters from him covering his career between 1758 and 1793, the period of his business and public activities and his land speculations. Yet so little is accurately known of him that his middle name is almost uniformly printed "Lettice."

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<sup>1</sup> Letters from William Franklin to William Strahan, *PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG.*, Vol. xxxv, p. 450.

The first of the family that we know was "Major Daniel Hooper of the Parish of Christ Church and Island of Barbadoes," whose will dated October 1, "in the twelfth year of his Majesty's Reign," which was 1700, recites that the testator "being now suddenly designed off the Island," makes this his last Will and Testament etc. It seems that the precaution was a wise one, for a few months later, on February 12, 1700-01, his will was proved in Barbadoes,<sup>2</sup> while ten days later, an "Inventory of the estate of Daniel Hooper of Barbadoes," was filed in New York by Captain Jeremiah Tottill as administrator.<sup>3</sup> From the Will being proved in Barbadoes on Feby. 12, and an Inventory, being filed in New York, as early as Feby. 22, it seems quite certain that Major Daniel Hooper died here on his visit, that his will was proved at his place of domicile and that Capt. Tottill was Administrator of the effects he left in this country.

In his Will he names four daughters: Mary, Elizabeth, Anne and Elinor and four sons: Daniel, the eldest; Robert Lettis, the second; and John and William, appoints Daniel and Robert Lettis, Executors, and adds "by way of caution and advice to my aforesaid four sons and it is my desire that so long as with convenience they may then do continue unanimous and united as well in heart as in Estate and interest, well knowing how great a strong thing and support they will be to each other when possibly separating may produce other efforts."

Daniel Hooper had evidently been in New Jersey at an earlier day, for we find that he was a member of the Governor's Council September 12, 1679, when he was commissioned one of the Justices of the Peace for the County Court at Elizabethtown and Newark, and he was again a member of the Governor's Council August 14, 1683.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A certified copy of the will made April 19, 1722, is on record at Trenton, in Deed Book B B, p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> Collection of New York Historical Society, Abstract of Wills, p. 377.

<sup>4</sup> New Jersey Archives Vol. xiii, p. 99 and Vol. xxi, p. 43.



Later he returned to Barbadoes, for on February 27, 1692-3, a Patent issued to "Daniel Hooper of the Island of Barbadoes, Merchant, for 648 acres in Somerset county, bounded Northeast by the Rareton river, South east by the commons, South west by the commons and the river and Northwest by the South branch of said river."<sup>5</sup> He seems to have endeavored to evade the payment of "dutys" on a cargo of "Rumm," from Barbadoes by ordering it to Perth Amboy instead of to New York, in which he acted on Cartaret's declaration, that "all vessels shall be free that come and trade with East Jersey," which, however, clashed with the orders of Andros "putting a duty of 20/ per Hogshead on Rumm." Accordingly "the 'Ketch' was taken up to New York and made to enter there and pay the Dutys before she could carry her Rumm to New Jersey" and this case was one of the reasons given by the Attorney General, in an opinion to Earl of Bellomont, June 30, 1698, "why Perth Amboy should not be a Free Port."<sup>6</sup>

Whether Robert Lettis Hooper, the first of the name in this country, came with his father on his last voyage to America or was here previously I cannot tell, but on August 16, 1701, he took out a marriage license in New York to marry Mrs. Sarah Graham.<sup>7</sup> Later he was the progenitor of the Sugar Trust, by having an Act passed by the Assembly of New York giving him *the exclusive right* to refine sugar, which was repealed in 1727, because he "neglected entirely the said manufacture."<sup>8</sup> The cause of this neglect was doubtless his removal to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, whence he was nominated by the Governor, January 2, 1724-5, Chief Justice of the colony, taking his seat at Burlington, March 30, 1725, although his commission, in the New Jersey Historical Society, is not dated

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<sup>5</sup> New Jersey Archives, Vol. xxi, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. ii, p. 232.

<sup>7</sup> New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, Vol. ii, p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> New York Colonial Documents, Vol. v, p. 847.

until February 29, 1727-8. He held office, with a short intermission, until his death early in 1738-9, when his remains were taken to New York for interment.<sup>9</sup> He does not appear to have been bred to the law, which, strange as it seems to us to-day, was not a pre-requisite for high judicial office in the provinces in colonial days. He was a member of the Assembly of New Jersey from Somerset county from 1721 to 1727, and in 1723, was appointed one of the commissioners to sign the first regular issue of New Jersey paper-money, which bears date March 25, 1724. He was Warden of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Perth Amboy, in 1726 and vestryman from 1734 to 1738. The early records show that he was commonly called "Collonel," as also that he was a member of the Governor's Council in 1735, his appointment to which was induced by his being "truly affectionate to his Majesty and the Royal Family, and in very high esteem and reputation in his country."<sup>10</sup> The will of the Chief Justice, dated January 27, 1738, and proved February 19, 1738-9, mentions wife Sarah and children Robert Lettis, James and Isabella.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Lettis Hooper Junior, as he was known until the death of his father, seems to have been interested in mills and in lands. In June, 1725, he advertises, as "Junior," from his plantation at Rocky Hill, Somerset county, N. J., and in the same way in August, 1731, when he offers land for sale. On April 14, 1738, shortly after his father's death he was chosen, without the "Junior," one of the Council of New Jersey and on April 19, 1740, was appointed to secure enlistments in Somerset county. March 28, 1749, he was made one of "His Majesties Justices of the Peace and Clerk of the Peace for Somerset county," and in June, 1751, was one of the Managers of the Trenton Lottery. In the *Pennsylvania Journal* for August 21,

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<sup>9</sup> Field's Provincial Courts of New Jersey, p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> New York Colonial Documents, Vol. vi, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Isabella married Philip Kearny and was the ancestress of General Philip Kearny, of the war of Secession.

1758, Robert Lettis Hooper advertises certain property for sale upon which he lives and which he will show to purchasers, or his sons, Robert Lettis Hooper, Jr., and Jacob Roeters Hooper, living at his Mills, opposite to Trenton, will do the same in his absence. A similar advertisement is inserted July 12, 1759. These are the first mentions we find of Robert Lettis Hooper, the third of the name, and the advertisements show him to have been a son of Robert Lettis Hooper the second, who died April 20, 1785,<sup>12</sup> in his seventy-seventh year and was buried in the Episcopal grounds in Trenton.<sup>13</sup>

In the *Pennsylvania Journal* for December 10, 1761, there is an advertisement of the dissolution of the partnership existing between Robert and Jacob Hooper, and on December 23, 1762, Robert Lettis Hooper, Jr., advertises good old Madeira "at his store in Water Street, three doors above Chestnut." His business difficulties caused him to appeal to the Assembly of Pennsylvania and he was "granted the enlargement of his person forever against all debts contracted before his surrender February 14, 1764"; while on May 4, 1768, a bill was presented to the Provincial Council of New Jersey for his relief. This "enlargement of his person," he did not feel, however, acquitted him of his debts, but felt as an honorable man they should be paid, so we find a letter from him to Samuel Howe, Burlington, N. J., dated Philadelphia, August 28, 1772,<sup>14</sup> offering to make conveyance of 1000 acres in Bedford county, Pa., in settlement of a debt due "at the time of my surrender . . . It is my desire to do justice to all my Creditors and at present this is the only offer I can make you." He then adds character-

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Robert Lettis Hooper to James Wilson from Belleville, April 22, 1785, in the Wilson Papers, Hist. Soc. of Penna. This is his first letter without "Junr" and it is rather amusing to find a letter from him in the same collection, of Dec. 28, 1785, where from force of habit he has added "Junr." after his name and then drawn his pen through it.

<sup>13</sup> Hall's Hist. of Presb. Church in Trenton, p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> Gratz Collection, Hist. Soc. of Penna.

istically, "You may depend on the titles being indisputable and the land good." Before this he had, in June, 1765, visited Sir William Johnson to look over his land with a view to making a settlement upon it and later crossed the Alleghenies and made surveys of the land of the proposed new colony for the Whartons and George Croghan, which led to his employment by Governor William Franklin in April, 1771, to give an account of the country he had gone out to survey at Fort Pitt. From his very intelligent and informing letter of May 22, 1771<sup>15</sup> it would appear that his home then was in Northampton county, Pa., for he speaks of "Three germans that came up with me from Northampton county in Pennsylvania." At this time Hooper was in correspondence with Sir William Johnson, concerning his journey to Fort Pitt and was an applicant for the post of Surveyor-General of the new proposed colony when it should be erected. He was back again in Philadelphia in March, 1772<sup>16</sup> but the next Fall was again at Fort Pitt, whence he wrote to William Franklin, September 15, 1772.<sup>17</sup> In the same collection is a copy of a deed from William Franklin to Robert Lettis Hooper, Jr., "of Trenton," dated April 19, 1774, showing that he had gone back to New Jersey; but on August 13, 1775, he wrote from Philadelphia the following letter to Capt. John Lowdon,<sup>18</sup> bubbling with patriotism, which is the first view we have of him in the Revolution.

<sup>15</sup> *Vide* Letters from William Franklin to William Strahan, PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG., Vol. XXXV, p. 450.

<sup>16</sup> *Vide* Letter from Hooper to William Franklin in Amer. Phil. Soc. of this date.

<sup>17</sup> Etting Collection, Hist. Soc. of Penna.

<sup>18</sup> John Lowdon's commission dated June 25, 1775 "to be a captain of a company of riflemen in the battalion commanded by Colonel William Thompson in the Army of the United Colonies," is printed in full in Penna. Arch. Ser. V., Vol. ii, pp. 3-4. His company was sworn in June 29th and on July 8th was on its way to Cambridge, Mass. On January 1, 1776, the rifle battalion became the First Regiment Continental Army. Capt. Lowdon when he raised his company, lived near the present town of Mifflinburg, Union Co., Pa., where he died in Feby., 1798, in his sixty-eighth year. Joseph Shippen, Jr., writes to the governor of Penna. from Lancaster

PHILADELPHIA August 13, 1775.

DEAR SIR:—

We hope this letter will find you safe at the head of your Company, acting in Defence & support of American Liberty—a glorious cause, which must stimulate the Breast of every honest, virtuous American and force him, with undaunted Courage & unabated vigour, to oppose those Ministerial Robbers. We hope the Contest will be ended where it began, and that the effusion of blood may be providentially prevented, but at the same time, we hope to see American Liberty permanently established or to have the honor, ere long, to serve in her righteous Cause, & we are well convinced that these sentiments prevail throughout this Province. You can't conceive what a Martial Spirit prevails here & in what order we are. Our Battalions with the Light Infantry Companys are very expert in all the manœuvres & are generally well furnished with Arms. Several Companys of Riflemen are formed in this City and the adjacent Countys who are become expert in shooting: besides we have 16 Row Galleys with Latteen Sails now building—some of them are already Rigged & Man'd. These Galleys are rowed with from 24 to 30 Oars & carry each one Gun from 18 to 32 pounds, besides swivel Guns Fore & Aft. We are told by experienced Men that these Galleys will prevent any Ships of War from coming up this River. All the Coast to Georgia is alarmed and prepared to oppose our unnatural enemies. Where then can these English Bastards, those servile engines of Ministerial power go to steel a few Sheep? God and Nature has prescribed their Bounds. They can't deluge our Lands nor float their Wooden Batterys beyond the bounds prescribed, nor dare they to penetrate so, as from afar, to view those high topt Mountains which

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April 19, 1756, recommending the appointment of "Mr. John Lowden living at Susquehannah" as Ensign in his company in Colonel Clapham's regiment. He says "He is a young gentleman of good sense, great activity and spirit."



seperates the lower plains from *our Canaan* and from whence, should their folly or madness prompt them to attempt it, could come forth our Thousands and tens of thousands with Guygantick strides to wash the plains with the blood of those degenerate invaders of the libertys of Mankind.

We, in conjunction with many others, presented a Memorial to Congress,<sup>19</sup> representing the threatned encroachments of the Connecticut Invaders of our Province. It was well received and the Connecticut Delegates & those of this province were desired to write to their people respectively & inclosed I send you a copy of the Connecticut Letters to Wyoming. Stansbury<sup>20</sup> has it in charge and it seems to be all that that Honorable Body could do in the affair.

Our partiality for the Rifle Battalion is so great that we are very anxious to hear of their having distinguished themselves in some great enterprize. This partiality is natural and allowable, when from our personal acquaintance with many of their Commanders we can, and do, with martial pride, celebrate their distinguished abilities as Rifleman & Soldiers.

We are with great Esteem

Dear Sir

Your most humble Servts

ROBERT LETTIS HOOPER, JUNR.

REUBEN HAINES.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The petition was presented to Congress July 31, 1775 and the subject was constantly before Congress during the rest of the year. *Vide Journals of Congress.*

<sup>20</sup> One Stansbury was appointed by Congress December 22, 1775 a Lieutenant in the Navy, he being third on the list which was headed by John Paul Jones.

<sup>21</sup> *Reuben Haines* was a Quaker Brewer and a friend and neighbour of Doctor Franklin. Although he signed this letter it is all in the handwriting of Hooper. It belongs to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

P. S. Present our Compliments to Mr. Lukins<sup>22</sup> & Mr North.<sup>23</sup> Mr. Musser<sup>24</sup> desires his compliments to you & them.

August 17<sup>th</sup> 1775

Since the date of this letter Hawkins Boon<sup>25</sup> has been down and says the Connecticut people have not attempted any incroachments lately & from circumstances we have little reason to apprehend they will.

Subsequently Hooper settled in Northampton county, Pa., which became the scene of his activities in the revolutionary struggle. He became Deputy Quarter Master General; one of the three Superintendents of "Magazines to be laid up for the Continental army," his department covering Northampton, Bucks, Berks and Philadelphia counties in Pennsylvania and Sussex county in New Jersey; Assistant Commissary of Purchases and Deputy Commis-

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<sup>22</sup> *Jesse Lukens* was a son of Surveyor-General John Lukens and went as a volunteer with Captain Matthew Smith's Lancaster company to Cambridge. He returned just in time to join Plunket's expedition against the Connecticut settlers at Wyoming, upon which he was mortally wounded Christmas day, 1775, and died a few days afterwards.

<sup>23</sup> *Caleb North* (1753-1840) of Chester Co., Pa. Captain in the 4th Battalion who was sent from Cambridge to join Arnold's Canada Expedition and subsequently became Lieut. Colonel of the 2nd Penna. Line with which he was at York Town and after the surrender was entrusted with the charge of the British prisoners on their march to Lancaster, Pa. He was President of the Pennsylvania State Society of the Cincinnati from 1828 until his death, when he was the last survivor of the Field Officers of the Pennsylvania Line.

<sup>24</sup> *John Musser*, a prominent Land agent in Lancaster, Pa., and speculator in British goods.

<sup>25</sup> *Hawkins Boon* was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant of the 4th Company of the 2nd Battalion of Northumberland Militia, January 24, 1776, and on October 4, 1776, Captain in Colonel Josiah Harmer's 6th Penna. Regiment; was subsequently transferred to the 12th and commanded the 7th Company in Morgan's Corps of Partisans. He was killed and scalped July 30, 1779, after the surrender of Freeland Fort, near Northumberland, Pa., to the British, he being off on a scout and not aware of the capitulation. *Vide Journals of Chaplain Rogers and of Major Norris in Sullivan's Expedition*, in one of which it is stated, that 40 men were killed with him and the other 14, both contemporary accounts. Which one is true?

sary of Transportation for Sullivan's army against the Six Nations. Commissions were issued to him April 2, 1778, and February 23, 1779, which are both long after his appointment and service, a not at all uncommon occurrence in the army and navy of that period, often occasioning much dissention and many questions affecting precedence and rank. All of these offices show that Hooper was a man of consideration and had the confidence of the Commander-in-Chief.

His earliest official military act of which we have record was when he writes to Owen Biddle of the Board of War from

SIR:—

EASTON April 9<sup>th</sup> 1777<sup>26</sup>

In obedience to your orders of the 3 Inst. I have sent Expresses thro' the greatest part of this County to procure Teams, and have the pleasure to inform you that I have been pretty successfull, as you will see by this inclosed Return, which is but a part of the number engaged, for all my Expresses are not yet returned.—I have reason to believe there is now gone, and getting ready to go about eighty Teams from County, and if your Honorable Board thinks more Teams will be wanted, I shall be glad to receive your *positive* Commands.

I found it absolutely necessary to promise the people that they might expect to draw Rations, for they were backward in going, fearing it would be impossible for them to supply themselves.

The people go in full expectation of my paying them on their Return to this County, if it is proper I am very willing to undertake that trouble.

I am with great respect

Sir, your hum<sup>e</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>

ROBT. L. HOOPER, JR.

This official letter was accompanied by the following private personal one to Biddle of even date.

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<sup>26</sup> PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG., Vol. xxiv, p. 390. ]



SAUCON April 9<sup>th</sup> 1777<sup>27</sup>

DEAR OWEN:—

Tell me by a line if I have acted right—I live about 5 Miles South of Bethlehem near the Great Road & it is best to order your Express (if you send) directly to me—Tell me all the news, and what you think of the talked of Invasion—Has France actually lent us 5 Million of Livers? in haist I am

Yours

R. L. HOOPER, JR.

It will be best for me  
to pay the people.

From its opening "Tell me by a line if I have acted right," it is plain that Hooper was in his novitiate as Deputy Quarter Master General and in doubt as to the scope of his authority, and it also shows that while he dates his official letters from Easton as his head-quarters, he did not actually live in the town, but that his home was at "Saucon," "about five miles south of Bethlehem."

Robert Lettis Hooper's name first occurs in the Journals of Congress, July 9, 1777, when a letter from him was read and referred to the Board of War. The following day it was "Ordered that 10,000 dollars be paid to Colonel Robert Lettis Hooper or his order on account of flour and beef purchased for the use of the army." He objected to the form of the Oath of Allegiance to the state and refused to subscribe to it, and was charged with favoring the Tories and oppressing the patriots in the impressment of "Waggons and Teams," which involved him in many contentions. These charges were taken up by the Council of Safety which wrote to President Wharton.<sup>28</sup>

LANCASTER 18, October 1777

\* \* \* \* "We cannot forbear to hint that a more careful attention to the appointment of officers would be

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<sup>27</sup> PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG., Vol. xxiv, p. 391.

<sup>28</sup> Penna. Archives, Vol. v., p. 684.

highly beneficial. These men in several instances by oppressing our Friends and excepting our secret Enemies from public Burdens, that of Waggon being impressed in particular, have but two successfully contributed to impress people with the notion that it is most for their Interest to be Tories. In the Quartermaster's Line we shall mention one or two among those we have heard Complaints—Mr. Robert Lettis Hooper of Easton and Mr John Biddle of Reading”

That Hooper was awake to these charges against him and ready to forestall them is shown by the following letter<sup>29</sup> to “His Excellency Thomas Wharton Esq’.”

Sir:—

EASTON October 20<sup>th</sup>: 1777

I received your Excellency's Letter of the 8th Instant, and have the pleasure to inform you, that I can hire in this County and in Sussex County in New Jersey, as many Teams as are from time to time necessary to answer the purposes in my Department, without being troublesome to your Excellency or the Majestates of this County. I have never impressed any Teams but when the exigency required their being provided with the utmost dispatch, and then those only who refused to serve and were unfriendly to our Cause

I have in almost every exigency called on the Majestates for their Assistance, and will continue so to do

I am, sir, Your Excellency's

most hum<sup>l</sup> servant

Rob<sup>l</sup>. Lettis Hooper, jun.

Depu<sup>y</sup>. Qu<sup>r</sup> M Gen<sup>l</sup>.

In consequence of the information from the Council, President Wharton advised the Board of War, which called forth the following reply.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Collection of William Nelson, Paterson, N. J.

<sup>30</sup> Penna. Archives, Vol. v, p. 756.

SIR:—

WAR OFFICE November 8, 1777

I am directed to inform you that the Board have taken into their consideration your Letter relating to the abuses alledged to be committed in the Quarter Master Generals Department & particularly the charges made against Col Hooper & Col Biddle & they are of opinion that an immediate inquiry should be made into matters wherein the public Interest is so materially concerned. I am to request your Excellency will please favour the Board with the Evidence on which these charges are founded & especially the Testimony against Col Hooper, which they wish to have at an early Day as he, in consequence of the Charge against him being transmitted to General Mifflin, has attended the Board & called upon them for an Enquiry into his conduct.

I have the Honour to be etc.

RICH. PETERS

*Secy.*

A month later Robert Levers, who seems to have been a secret agent for the state, wrote to Timothy Matlack<sup>31</sup> from

EASTON December 8, 1777.

“Agreeably to the Directions I received, when last at Lancaster from the Supreme Executive Council, that on my return home, I should make Enquiry whether or not Mr. Henry Vanfleck had certainly procured a Pass from Col. Hooper, at the time he, Mr. Vanfleck passed the Delaware, about three weeks ago. I have made the necessary Enquiry, and in consequence thereof, beg leave to refer Council to the enclose affidavits. \* \* \* With respect to Mr Hooper’s discouraging the Inhabitants of this county to take the oath of allegiance, it has been too general and too glaring to deny; and with respect to Passes, Evidence thereof is before Council. But as to his Partiality in pressing Waggon’s to the distress of Whiggs and the Relief of Tories, I believe the Information is ill founded.”

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<sup>31</sup> Penna. Archives, Vol. vi, p. 77.

It is plain however, from an Order<sup>32</sup> promulgated by the Board of War, on January 22, 1778, while these charges were still pending against Hooper, that they were not regarded as very serious, owing doubtless to Levers' report that the charge of oppression was unfounded.

"Ordered That Colonel Robert Lettis Hooper D. Q. Master General exercise the same Powers in the hiring or impressing Teams he has heretofore done under the orders of His Excellency General Washington or other his Superior Officer, any Regulation or Direction from any Person not acting in Virtue of the orders or the Powers vested in His Excellency within the Limits therein mentioned, *notwithstanding*."

Nevertheless the Council, from Lancaster, on February 7, 1778, advises the Delegates in Congress in regard to the charges against Hooper based upon the letter from Levers and forward the proofs against him.<sup>33</sup> It would appear however, by the following letter from President Wharton to Thomas McKean that Hooper, not getting the satisfaction he required from the authorities officially, took the matter into his own hands and got some personal, if unofficial satisfaction.<sup>34</sup>

Dear Sir:—

LANCASTER Feb. 15, 1778

"An incident at Reading some days past disturbs me. Mr. Sergeant<sup>35</sup> being then as Attorney General at the Quarter Sessions was assaulted and beaten by Robert

<sup>32</sup> Penna. Archives, Vol. vi, p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. vi, p. 242.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. vi, p. 266.

<sup>35</sup> *Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant* (1746–1793) was a grandson of Jonathan Dickinson, first President of Princeton college where he was graduated. He studied law in New Jersey and in July, 1777, became Attorney-General of Pennsylvania, which he held until 1780. He was active in the relief of the sufferers from yellow fever in Philadelphia and fell a victim to the pestilence.

Lettis Hooper Esquire on account of some information the former gave in the late Council of Safety of this State. \* \* Many and loud complaints were I understood made to assembly last fall against Mr Hooper & others. \* \* \* Congress desired evidence as to the first. Some affidavits were taken. One was drawn for Mr. Sergeant to attest; it related to the Countenance given by Mr. Hooper in furnishing a letter to one Leonard, an avowed Jersey Tory to pass thro' Pennsylvania. It happened that Mr. Sergeant left town without finishing this affidavit. Another, drawn for Mr. Arndt,<sup>36</sup> of Northampton, was left in the same state. When Mr. Arndt was travelling homeward he was threatened & insulted by Hooper & threats were also liberally made openly by him, against Mr. Sergeant. \* \* \* When he asked an office of Council, I confess that upon 20 yrs general knowledge of him, I preferred another. \* \* By a glare of evidence it appears that Mr. H. not only refused to take & subscribe an Oath of Allegiance, ordered by law, but that he influenced others to decline it. This conduct brought him very naturally under the suspicion of being a Tory; for tho' his connection with the army might perhaps excuse him from the test, yet wherefore he should, if a Whig, set himself against this necessary mode of discrimination between Friends & Foes, is hard to be accounted for. \* \* I am glad however, as I hear that Mr. H. resents the suspicion, that Congress have at length prescribed a form for their officers that will enable him to yield a Testimony of this nature without any scruple.\* \* But to return. The omission of taking these attestations

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<sup>36</sup> *John Arndt* was a Justice of the Peace for Northampton county and as such was authorized by President Wharton to collect forage e.c., which he reported as very difficult to do "as Col. Hooper in the quarter master's department allows to pay \* \* \* prices \* \* \* higher than wee are authorized to pay by law." (Pa. Arch., Vol. vi, p. 336.) Hooper with his good free English blood knew that the soldiers had to be fed at any price, law or no law, but the close fistcd Teuton would let them starve rather than run the risk of an overcharge; so it is plain there was bad blood between the two men leading up to the altercation.



delayed the sending the proof to York. Mr. Sergeant did not come back till lately when he declined to attest to the writing he had drawn up. \* \* At Reading Mr. Hooper met him & acted as above. \* \* Mr. Sergeant was the smallest, Mr. Arndt the oldest & most infirm of the late Council of Safety. They were very unequal to H. in power of body & his advantage over them was great."

The closing paragraph gives a charming bit of local color to the portraiture of the participants that is unusual in the writings of those busy times. The following day a letter from the Board of War, with one from Hooper, was laid before Congress and referred to Thomas McKean, Abraham Clark and Nathaniel Scudder. On February 17th, this Committee brought in a very severe report which was taken into consideration and thereupon the following resolution was passed.

Whereas by the resolution of the 14 instant the Commissioners appointed by the State of Pennsylvania were authorized and directed to purchase and store in magazine, 30,000, barrels of flour, on the east side of the Susquehanna, & by a letter, since laid before Congress, from R. L. Hooper, Nathaniel Falconer and Jonathan Mifflin Jun. three of the Superintendents appointed by the Board of War, in pursuance of a resolve of the 15 January last, it appears that the said Superintendents are making contracts for executing the business entrusted with the said Commissioners, contrary to the intentions of Congress expressed in these said resolutions; and whereas, it also appears by the aforesaid letter, that the above named Superintendants, without any authority, in direct violation of the Laws of Pennsylvania and contrary to the instructions given by the Board of War, have presumed to fix and ascertain the prices of several other articles wanted in the Army, much higher than fixed by law in the State, directing the quarter masters to govern themselves by such illegal rates: therefore,

*Resolved* that the Board of War be directed immediately to recal and suspend the said R L Hooper, Nathaniel Falconer and Jonathan Mifflin Jr. who are required to lay before Congress their proceedings and accounts.

Less than a week before this action in Congress, Hooper promulgated the following carefully prepared and thoroughly business like circular letter<sup>37</sup> bearing directly on the subject at issue.

READING Feb: 12<sup>th</sup>: 1778

Sir:—

As you are appointed by the superintendants for forming magazines of Provisions for the army, to purchase wheat & manufacture it into flour. I am directed by Major Gl. Mifflin Q. M. G. to request you will also purchase all the Rye Spelts Indian corn & oats you can at the following rates viz<sup>t</sup>. Rye @ 12s. Ɔ bushl. Spelts & oats at 7s. 6d. Ɔ bushel & Indian corn at 9s. Ɔ bushel.

You must grind all the Rye Indian corn & spelts you purchase into Horse feed which when ground you must pack into flour barrels & secure in the way you are directed by the Superintendants in the 4<sup>th</sup>. Article of their Instructions.

You shall be paid four pounds Ɔ hundred bushells for grinding packing & delivering out, & two pence Ɔ bushel on all the oats you purchase with a reasonable allowance for storeage and expences.

Cap<sup>t</sup>. N. Falconer superintendant of the district in which you reside will furnish you with money when & as often as it will be necessary. And on every monday you must make a return to him of all the grain you have purchased & of the quantity you have issued on orders.

In issuing you must be directed by the 7<sup>th</sup>. Article of your Instructions from the superintendants.

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<sup>37</sup> In Collection of William Nelson, Paterson, N. J.

From those persons who refuse to thresh out their grain & to deliver to you so much of it as they can reasonably spare you are to seize it in the straw, and to be directed by the first article of your Instructions from the Superintendants.

You must collect all the grain you can, & you must not delay any time in doing it.

I am Sir Your h. s.

Robt. Lettis Hooper,  
Dep<sup>y</sup>. Q<sup>r</sup>. M. Gen<sup>l</sup>.

On February 21, a letter from General Washington, dated Valley Forge, February 15, 1778, to the three Superintendents concerning the distress of the army for meat and forage, was laid before Congress and read, while four days later President Wharton requested Congress to furnish him with sundry papers relative to the action of Congress on the 17th instant. Within a fortnight after the rebuke by Congress, Hooper cured the chief charge against him by subscribing to the new form of oath, which his former investigator Levers communicated to "Timothy Matlack Sec'y of the Comwlth of Penna."<sup>33</sup>

EASTON, March 8, 1778

SIR;—

Herewith I send to you a Duplicate Certificate of Col. Hooper's having taken the Oaths agreeable to the Resolve of Congress.

I am, Sir, etc

ROBERT LEVERS.

This whole business of refusing to take the old oath and taking the new one, although something of a matter of form, had also some substance to sustain it and the man, in Hooper's position, who maintained the courage of his convictions, is entitled to respect and consideration,

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<sup>33</sup> Penna. Archives, Vol. vi, p. 344.



as showing a determined spirit to fight for what he thought was right, which after all was the keynote of the revolutionary war. His subscribing to the Oath evidently ended this tempest in a tea-pot, leaving only an echo behind, for on April 9, 1778, Congress ordered "That a Warrant issue on the Treasurer for \$133,333.33 in favor of Robert Lettis Hooper Esq to answer an Order of the 3rd day of April Instant in his favor drawn by Major General Greene, Quarter-Master General, for the use of his Department, who is to be accountable."

The echo we find in a letter Hooper indited to Vice-President George Bryan of Pennsylvania.<sup>39</sup>

SIR:—

PHILA. Aug<sup>t</sup> 31, 1778.

Permit me to address you on a subject which has for some time past given me much uneasyness, as from false representations made to the Honorable the Supreme Executive Council, that honorable Body have conceived me to be a dangerous person in the State violent and ungovernable. I cannot deny to you honourable Sir, that I have a very great contempt for Mr Sarjent and Mr Arndt as private Gentlemen. They have made several attempts to ruin my reputation as an Officer in the service of the States and have induced the honourable Council to exhibit charges against me, which Mr Sarjent & Mr Arndt could not support. This drew me into a personal Quarrell with them \* \* \* and whilst I was warm with resentment against them I wrote a Letter to the Honble Gouverneur Morris, the particulars in Expression which Letter I dont well remember but believe, from information that they were generally ungentlemanly, and indecent. I hope Sir, you will believe, & that the Honourable Council will believe I have long had a great personal regard for the late Worthy President and you, that I have ever had reason to esteem those Gentlemen in Council with whom I have the honour to be acquainted as worthy Citizens and that

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<sup>39</sup> Penna. Archives, 2nd Ser., Vol. iii, p. 236.

I am sorry to find the expressions in that letter may be construed to extend to you or them. Permit me then to request you will be pleased to assure Council that I never meant to reflect on their honour's honorable body.

As we said, we should hear further distant reverberations from the old charges and they come this time in one of Joe Reed's characteristic carping letters, to General Greene, in which he slandered every one from Mifflin down, so that Hooper could not of course escape, and which I only quote to show how prominently Hooper was in the public eye.<sup>40</sup>

PHILA. Nov. 5, 1778

"I confess I never was able to discern the Policy or Wisdom of continuing under you Men devoted at all Points to those who were the fixed & inveterate Enemies of the Department, who were quite in another Interest & who I firmly believe only remained in office to cover more effectually their own Conduct and embarrass and betray you. That there are some of these I suppose you cannot be ignorant, but the person whom I principally refer to is Col. Hooper & who I verily believe was brought in for the above Purposes. \* \* Col. Hooper not only harangued & exerted every Power, but the Clerks of office were employed in Writing Tickets and then march'd off with all their Dependants for the like purpose [of voting for members hostile to the authority of the State in which they were to act.] \* \* \* \* I am inclined to think Congress will soon suspend Hooper for some practices not very honorable to himself or the Department."

Six weeks later we hear a little more of it when Congress, on December 22, 1778, received a report from the Committee to whom was referred sundry letters from Major General Mifflin, late Quarter Master General that "it appears probable that during the winter 1777 and the spring, 1778 when the army was in the suffering state

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<sup>40</sup> N. Y. Hist. Soc. Coll., Lee Papers, Vol. iii, p. 246.

before mentioned, sundry brigades of waggons in the publick service were sent to New Windsor, Newburgh Hartford, & Boston with flour and Iron on private accounts and brought back private property. That it also appears probably from said affidavits, that the said Flour & Iron had been taken as for public use at the regulated prices then fixed by law and that the Waggons during such Transportation were subsisted at the different posts on the publick forage. That Colonel Robert Lettis Hooper, then and now Deputy Quarter Master General appears to have been the principal Director of the said Waggons at that time."

For some reason the consideration of the subject was postponed, apparently indefinitely and only cropped up again the following spring when President Reed anew put his finger in the pie, by addressing a lengthy communication, on April 15, 1779, to Congress, covering a copy of a report of the Joint Committee of the Council of Penna. in which among other things it was said:

"2ndly For that complaint having been made by the Council of Safety of the great abuse of public Waggons by Robert Lettis Hooper Jr. Deputy Quarter Master General, to the Board of War in January & February 1778, that Board without giving any hearing to the Council to support their charge, heard Mr Hooper's story, supported by *ex-parte* affidavits and acquitted him, the Council then sitting at Lancaster & the complainants & witnesses being in Northampton, seventy miles off, unacquainted with any such proceeding.

\* \* \* \* \*

3rdly, The said Hooper presuming upon this favourable reception, fell upon the Attorney General of the State who had *ex officio* drawn up the said representation and beat him; but not satisfied with this wrote a letter to the Honble Gouverneur Morris Esquire, a Member of Congress on a committee at the Valley Forge, boasting of said

exploit, and that as he had horse-whipped the Attorney General, he proposed to go through with the Council and should not stop at the President of the State. Which letter was publickly shown by the said Mr. Morris to the Commander-in-Chief and others. But being demanded by the delegates of Pennsylvania as a high Insult to the State, was refused upon the allegation of its being a private letter."

No action was taken upon this appeal that I can find, but whether it was the source of future trouble for Hooper, or whether he got into fresh difficulties, certain it is that he was remanded for military Court Martial for some offence in which the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania took a hand, for it summoned witnesses to "attend the Tryal of Mr Hooper at Morristown;"<sup>41</sup> and it is doubtless to this body Hooper refers in a letter to his assistant Richard Backhouse, from Easton, February 23, 1780, advising him "My Tryal is put off till Doctor Shippen's is over," when he writes "We have nothing to fear from the malice of that base Junto."<sup>42</sup> At the very time of this letter Congress was considering changes in the Quarter Master's and Commissary departments of the army, and on July 15th, 1780, the same day that Washington, from Preakness, transmitted to Congress the findings of the Court Martial in Doctor Shippen's case, that body adopted "a new regulation for the Quarter Master's department" materially reducing the number of Deputy Quarter Masters General and abolishing after August 1st, "all posts without troops there stationed and in the Continental service" as burthensome and expensive. This action of course legislated Hooper out of office and naturally put an end to his proposed Tryal which then could have availed nothing. That this was the result we find by a notice in *The New Jersey Gazette* for October 11, 1780, from Robert Lettis Hooper, "*Late D. Q. M. Gen.*"

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<sup>41</sup> Penna. Colonial Records, Vol. 12, p. 250.

<sup>42</sup> Mss. in Historical Society of Penna.

BELLEVILLE October 10, 1780.

All persons who have any demands against the late Quarter Master General's Department for contracts performed and services done under the direction of the Subscriber for the Use of the United States, are requested to meet him in Easton, on the tenth day of November next, then and there to make a final settlement of their accounts, that he may be sooner enabled to present his accounts and to do that justice to the good people in his *late district* which the wisdom and justice of Congress have pointed out in their late resolutions

ROBERT L. HOOPER,  
Late D. Q. M. Gen.

While this advertisement brings to a chronological conclusion the military career of Colonel Robert Lettis Hooper, Jr., we shall go back for some important incidents connected with it.

There are a number of letters from Hooper during the years 1778 and 1779, written chiefly from Easton to General Edward Hand, among the Hand Papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, some of which are of much interest, especially when he writes from

NEWTOWN, Bucks Co. Jany. 15, 1779

"In Northampton County we have a very considerable Shoe Factory, the foundation of which I laid and the Board of War has in a great measure put this Factory and the disposal (or distribution) of the shoes under my care. \* \* \* \* On your order I will at any time send you from one to five hundred pairs and they are good. *Appropoz* do you want a smart pair of Boots? \* \* \* \* This Factory I have told you of, produces near 1000 pairs of shoes a Month."

Hooper was one of the officers to whom Washington propounded a series of questions, in the Spring of 1779,



as to the best means of reaching the country of the Six Nations, and his answers will be found in the Washington Manuscripts in the Library of Congress.<sup>43</sup> As early as January, 1779, when this Western Expedition, commonly called Sullivan's Expedition, was in the air he wrote to Hand "I have my Eye to what you hint of an Expedition. I will have 50 good Saltpetered Tongues prepared for you and Mount my Hobby Horse and show you, on paper, all the Country between the Delaware and Susquehannah. I have an accurate survey of the Delaware." Four days later he writes, "I will soon furnish you with the Draughts of Delaware and Susquehannah"; while on March 15, he says, evidently in great glee over the honor, "Soon after you left me, I was called to Head Quarters" to give information on the subject you have often hinted to me and to require my assistance in the Map way. This part has been delayed by the essential part being in Philadelphia. I am anxious to compleat it & you shall have it when done."<sup>45</sup> These communications show that Hooper's knowledge as a surveyor had come into play in a more important matter and in a very different way, doubtless, from what he anticipated when he was running lines at Fort Pitt, although the advance rumblings of the coming revolution could be distinctly heard and felt at that time.

Before this, as later, he was specially entrusted with the care of British prisoners. On this point the following letter<sup>46</sup> addressed "To Elias Boudinot, Esquire Comy. Genl. of Prisoners at Reading," is both interesting and important.

<sup>43</sup> Friedenwald's Calendar, p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> Anent Washington's Queries.

<sup>45</sup> Hooper's ability as a Map draughtsman is well exhibited in "A Draught of Mr. Joseph Wharton Junr's Land on the Waters of Tannaderra, Containing Fifteen Thousand and seventy-four Acres with allowance of Five p. cent etc. Surveyed in May and June 1770 p. Robert L. Hooper" in the Wilson Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Collection of William Nelson, Paterson, N. J.

Dear Sir:—

BETHLEHEM Nov<sup>r</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> 1777

I wrote you yesterday by Express, and sent you a List of all the Brittish prisoners in this County with M<sup>r</sup> Dikins's<sup>47</sup> Bond & parole.

This will be delivered to you by Major Edmenson,<sup>48</sup> who has given me his parole to go to Little York—he is accompanied by Ensign [Lieutenant]<sup>49</sup> Rich<sup>d</sup>. Hankey, Lieute [Ensign]<sup>50</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Finch & Doct. Minzey<sup>51</sup> whose paroles I have, with the Majors sent to Colo: Holler<sup>52</sup>—

I am told a French Gentleman who has the Rank of a Major in our Service is made Prisoner of War, and I understand the Marquis De Fiet<sup>53</sup> interests himself much in his Exchange. Could nothing be effected for Major Edmeson on that head?

It gives me pleasure to inform you that Major Edmeson has merited from me every indulgence that I as a Continental Officer could shew him, & I can with the greatest certainty recommend him to you as a Gentleman of strict honour—if he is not exchanged he wishes to return to this County, in which if he is indulged, I will place him at Nazareth, unless otherwise directed, and be answerable for the Major in every respect

You'll please to add to the Gen<sup>l</sup>. List sent you by Express John Frederick Naulder taken at Trenton Decem<sup>r</sup>. 26-77<sup>54</sup>—a private Capt. Friends Com<sup>r</sup>. of Count Donops Chaseurs—he came here with our Sick this day & I have sent him on to Colo: Holler—

I am Dear Sir

Your most hble Servt

Rob<sup>t</sup>. Lettis Hooper, jr.

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Dilkes, Major 49th Regiment of Foot.

<sup>48</sup> Probably Major Charles Edmonstone, of the 18th British regiment.

<sup>49</sup> Erased, and "Ensign" interlined. He was 20th Regiment of Foot.

<sup>50</sup> Erased, and "Lieute" interlined. Of the 27th Regiment of Foot.

<sup>51</sup> Probably Surgeon Archibald Menzies, of the 27th British regiment.

<sup>52</sup> Col. Henry Haller, wagon master in the Pennsylvania military service.

<sup>53</sup> Marquis de la Fayette.

<sup>54</sup> December 26, 1776, is meant, of course.

Washington seems to have reposed especial confidence in Hooper, as we find he was given charge of the distinguished Baron Riedesel, wife, children and suite and General William Phillips, captured at Saratoga, under orders from the Commander-in-Chief that they should be quartered only at Bethlehem or Nazareth, Pa., and their paroles of Nov. 15, 1779, were sent by Washington to Hooper.<sup>55</sup> Hooper's genial nature and social qualities may have had not a little to do with this assignment, as these distinguished prisoners, especially Riedesel, were treated with all the consideration commensurate with their positions. That Hooper possessed these qualities is shown by several letters that we have. From New York, April 10, 1774, he tells<sup>56</sup> of meeting at Flatbush the venerable Cadwallader Colden who he says, "is the best real Picture of an Old Man that I ever saw. He is eighty-seven years old, has his hearing and senses as well as ever he had, without marks of age, except his eyes which grow dim and his head covered with strong white hair. His Madeira is excellent and he is no churl; indeed he pushed me so hard that I was obliged to shear off." Five years later on Christmas Day, 1779, he wrote to General Hand, "I shall be happy to see you at my House and to crack *One Bottle* of good Madeira with you." The underscoring of the "*One Bottle*" tells of the shrunken cellars of those days and the impossibility of replenishment.

As he was generous to himself and his friends at home, so he was to the poor fellows who were suffering in the field. We find him among those subscribing £5000 to the Bank of Pennsylvania, organized by Robert Morris "for the purpose of supplying the Army of the United States with provisions for two months," which was opened July 17, 1781, with a total capital of £315,000. Hooper was doubtless a man of large fortune for those

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<sup>55</sup> Etwein's Diary at Bethlehem in the Revolution. PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG., Vol. xiii, p. 88.

<sup>56</sup> PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG., Vol. xviii, p. 513.



days, with decidedly speculative tastes, which was one of the evils of the times and brought so many of prominence to ruin. He inherited a taste for great schemes in lands and in business enterprises from his great-grandfather, grandfather and father, each of whom, as we have seen in the earlier pages of this sketch, were engaged along the same lines as he followed. He was an extensive land speculator or, as he would be called to-day, not improperly, "land grabber," being listed, as early as 1775, for unpaid taxes on tracts he had taken up in Bedford, Northampton, Northumberland and Westmoreland counties in Pennsylvania. He also was interested one-third in "Iron Mine Tract of land on the Southerly waters of Walunpanpack, in the county of Northampton, Penna."<sup>57</sup> But his largest deal seems to have been in partnership with James Wilson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States by appointment of Washington, and Simeon DeWitt, Surveyor General of the State of New York for half a century until his death, "to adventure" in the "vacant and unappropriated lands between the line of the Indian Cession made at Fort Stanwix, in 1768, and the Northern Boundary of Pennsylvania," in the State of New York.<sup>58</sup> It seemed such a land of promise that they called it "The Canaan Company" and Hooper attended to all the details of the business at Albany and on the ground; but it does not appear that the promise was fulfilled; on the contrary it seems to have been, like most all of such "adventures" at that time, a financial failure for the original purchasers. Likewise he was in partnership with George Taylor, the Signer of the Declaration of Independence, who came to this country as a redemptioner and was bound to the iron master at Durham, Pa., whose widow he subsequently married when he

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<sup>57</sup> Letter to James Wilson, March 9, 1787, Hist. Soc. of Penna.

<sup>58</sup> *Vide* Agreement of May 4, 1785, in Wilson Papers, Hist. Soc. of Penna

became proprietor of the works,<sup>59</sup> Richard Backhouse and Colonel Isaac Sidman, in the Durham Iron Works from early in 1780 until the death of Taylor in February of the following year, when the surviving partners became involved in disputes with his executors, which seem to have been constantly agitated during the next five years before a settlement was made and which must have required very delicate handling, from the fact that Hooper was one of the executors of Taylor's will, by which Taylor bequeathed to Hooper "a neat silver-mounted small sword to be thus engraved 'In memory of George Taylor, Esquire.'"

About this time Hooper followed his friend Taylor's example and became deeply interested in the Ringwood Iron Works, in New Jersey, by marrying the widow of their owner. We know by a deed dated July 3, 1759, that prior thereto "Robert Lettis Hooper Junior of Kinsbury, Burlington county, Merchant," had married Margaret Biles, "grand-daughter of Thomas Lambert of Nottingham in said county," and we also know that she was living with him at Easton as late as April 28, 1779, when he writes to General Hand, "Mrs. Hooper has been collecting Shad for two weeks to fill a Bbl. at the moderate price of 5/ and 7/6 p. Shad."<sup>60</sup> We are, however, in the dark as to when or where she died, but on October 31, 1781, at Trenton, he took out a license to marry Elizabeth Erskine. There is a very charming letter framed in the Hewitt Mansion, at Ringwood, dated September 7, 1781, from Hooper, to his old friend Backhouse, announcing his intended engagement. He writes, "I have long wished to visit you, but, my worthy Friend, I have been much engaged. I must not trifle with you & in plain truth I

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<sup>59</sup> *Vide* History of the Durham Iron Works, Proc. Bucks County Historical Society, Vol. i, p. 232, wherein it is disputed that George Taylor was a Redemptioner, with very good cause, as there were few, if any, Redemptioners who were not aliens of Great Britain.

<sup>60</sup> Hand Papers Hist. Soc. of Penna.

have been hunting for a wife. I am sure among all my numerous acquaintances there is not one that esteems me more than you do, and I love you with the genuine warmth of true friendship. You then, Dear Sir, must be pleased when I tell you that I am engaged to Mrs Erskine, a Lady high in estimation for her good sense, affability and sweetness of Temper & blessed withall with a plentiful Fortune. I assure you that I do on the most deliberate principles of honour think that comfort and felicity will attend the choice I have made."<sup>61</sup>

Elizabeth Erskine was the widow of Robert Erskine, F. R. S., who was sent to this country in 1772, by "The London Company" to take charge of the "New York and New Jersey Iron Works," sometimes called "The American Ringwood Company in Bergen county."<sup>62</sup> Erskine was eminent in many branches of science and by resolution of Congress, July 25, 1777, was appointed "Geographer and Surveyor General to the Army of the United States," at Washington's Head-quarters. He was born in Scotland September 7, 1735, and died at his house at Ringwood, N. J., October 2, 1780, and is buried there, a monument being erected to him by order of Washington.<sup>63</sup> The Marquis de Chastellux stopped at Ringwood, December 19, 1780, and called upon Mrs. Erskine. He says, "I entered a very handsome house, where everybody was in mourning, Mr. Erskine being dead two months before. Mrs. Erskine, his widow, is about forty, and did not appear the less fresh and tranquil for her misfortune." In the *Pennsylvania Journal* for July 6, 1782, the adjournment of the New Jersey legislature is noted and among the important acts passed was

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<sup>61</sup> The Ringwood Iron Works and the Durham Iron Works in more recent times became the property of Edward Cooper and Abraham S. Hewitt of New York, whose family still own them and this letter is in the possession of Mrs. Abraham S. Hewitt.

<sup>62</sup> History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N. J., by John Hall, p. 316.

<sup>63</sup> William Nelson in *Mag. of Amer. Hist.*, Vol. iii, p. 579.

one "To vest in Robert Lettis Hooper, the younger, and Elizabeth his wife and the survivor of them with powers of agency, to take charge of and manage the estate of the American Company, commonly so called in the counties of Bergen and Morris and elsewhere in this state, for the purposes mentioned therein." Mrs. Elizabeth Hooper died in 1796 and her husband survived until the next year when he died on the 30th of July, 1797, in his sixty-seventh year, at his residence called Belleville, near Trenton. His will dated July 12 and proved August 7, 1797, shows that he left no issue<sup>64</sup> as the residuary estate went to his sister Isabella Johnson of Perth Amboy.<sup>65</sup> Hooper's elegant seat "at the Falls of Delaware about a mile above Trenton," containing 100 acres, was purchased by him April 3, 1779. It had previously been the residence of Sir John St Clair<sup>66</sup> and then of Lord Stirling.<sup>67</sup> After Hooper's death Belleville passed into the hands of the Rutherford family and was advertised for Sale by John Rutherford in 1806.

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<sup>64</sup> Among the records of Christ Church, Philadelphia, there is a *baptism*, May 1, 1789 of Robert *Lettice* Hooper, son of Robert and *Eve* Hooper, born July 2, 1788. There is also a *burial*, September 3, 1790 of Robert *Lettes* son of Robert Hooper. As these records were usually made by the Verger, a person of ordinary or no education, and not by the rector, I think there can be little doubt but that this was the infant of Robert Lettis and Elizabeth Hooper.

<sup>65</sup> In the New York Genealogical and Biographical Record for 1902, p. 248, in "Some Annandale Johnstons in America" it is stated that John, son of Andrew and Catharine Van Cortlandt Johnson, married "Isabella daughter of *Rev. Morris Lettice* Hooper of Trenton, N. J." She was of course the daughter of Robert Lettis Hooper, the 2nd of the name.

<sup>66</sup> Sir John St Clair was Lieutenant-Colonel of the 22nd Regiment and Deputy Quarter-Master-General of all the British Forces in America. He came with Braddock and was wounded near Fort Du Quesne. He married Elizabeth Moland of Philadelphia, March 17, 1762, and died at Bellville, Elizabethtown, N. J., November 26, 1767, to which place he must have removed from Trenton and named his new home after his old one. There is an original miniature of him painted by Copley and signed "J. S. C. 1759" in the Hist. Soc. of Penna. *Vide* PENNA. MAG. OF HIST. AND BIOG., Vol. ix, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Hall's History of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N. J., p. 102.

Robert Lettis Hooper was in every sense of the word a man of affairs and he seems never to have been idle or even slothful. When towards the close of the war it became necessary for the inhabitants of Trenton to meet to consider a plan of Association to prevent trade and intercourse with the enemy, they got together on July 11, 1782, and chose Hooper chairman, who the following day issued an address "on behalf of the Committee" urging the people to desist from such actions.<sup>68</sup> He was one of the Justices for Hunterdon county and Judge of the Common Pleas in 1782, 1787 and 1792; succeeded John Cleves Symmes as Vice-President of the Council of New Jersey in November, 1785, which he continued to hold for three years, being Chairman of the Joint Meeting of the Legislature in 1788, and during the absence of the Governor acted in his place.<sup>69</sup> He was an Honorary member of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Jersey, elected at the second meeting of the society held at Princeton, N. J., September 24, 1783, along with Elias Boudinot, President of Congress, William Livingston, Governor of the State, Frederick Frelinghuysen and Thomas Henderson.

Among the members of the Union Fire Company, instituted May 8, 1747, we find "Robert Lettis Hooper Vice President of the Council and the man who first laid out Mill Hill and Bloomsbury for a town."<sup>70</sup> He was also the first Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New Jersey of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, which was instituted by a charter from England December 18, 1786, and he was the first Senior Warden of Trenton Lodge No 5, which was chartered in 1787, to which by his will

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<sup>68</sup> Raum's History of Trenton, pp. 366-371, where all the proceedings will be found.

<sup>69</sup> Letter to James Wilson, Nov. 9, 1785. "Our Governor must leave Council next Friday and will not return before Monday. I must take the chair and being so circumstanced I cannot come to you." Hist. Soc. of Penna.

<sup>70</sup> Raum's History of Trenton, p. 398.



he gave "my silver hilted sword now in their possession, in testimony of the esteem and affection I bear to the fraternity and to that Lodge in particular, and that the said sword be new mounted by my Executors and paid for out of my Estate." This is doubtless the sword bequeathed to him by George Taylor; but the Lodge has no record of it.

Hooper possessed a distinctly interesting personality and was quite a picturesque character, ever open to any scheme that presented an opportunity for adventure or profit, but, from the records that we have examined in the course of the investigations for this memoir, there was apparently more of the former than of the latter gained, unless it was in his last matrimonial speculation entered into when he was past his fiftieth year. Certainly his career as we have related it warrants the surprise expressed at the opening, that it has not been told before, and we shall close this relation with the words of his obituary in Claypoole's *Daily Advertiser* for August 11, 1797: "He had long the charge of important offices, civil and military, which he executed with fidelity and was very much respected in his private relations of life."<sup>71</sup>

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rob. Lettis Hooper". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

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<sup>71</sup> It is a great pleasure, as also a plain duty, to express my appreciation of the assistance I have received in the gathering of material for this article from John W. Jordan, LL.D., Librarian of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; William Nelson, Esq., Corresponding Secretary of the New Jersey Historical Society; Dr. B. F. Fackenthal, Jr., President of the Thomas Iron Company; and F. C. Griffith, Esq., of Trenton, N. J.



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